



October 6, 2015

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chair, Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Murkowski,

I am writing in support of *S. 1971, the California Coastal National Monument Expansion Act* and to ask for your leadership to secure the highest level of protection for the national treasures that surround the Piedras Blancas Lighthouse.

Friends of the Elephant Seal is a not-for-profit, 501(c)3, organization dedicated to the preservation of the Piedras Blancas Elephant Seal Colony for ecological, educational, scientific, historic or scenic opportunities. Our docents—a cadre of nearly 100 volunteer guides—have interpreted seal behavior for rookery visitors since 1997.

A 2005 agreement between the State of California and Hearst Corporation made the entire six miles of rookery beaches part of Hearst San Simeon State Park. In 2011, Friends of the Elephant Seal became a Cooperating Association with the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Our docents now serve in the Piedras Blancas Northern Elephant Seal Rookery as California State Parks Volunteers.

Hearst San Simeon State Park was brought into the Piedras Blancas Outstanding Natural Area under provisions of the *2008 Consolidated Natural Resources Act* and is jointly managed under Cooperating Agreements signed by the Bureau of Land Management and the California Department of Parks and Recreation.

These Cooperating Agreements represent the current status of efforts to protect this area. A single property owner acted as steward of this land with exemplary range management practices for over 100 years prior to 1992 when the birth of a single elephant seal pup signaled the beginning of the rookery. The current population of the colony is more than 23,000 with more than 5,000 births recorded in each of the last several years.

Through the intervening years, financial and staff support to protect this precious resource was given by the County of San Luis Obispo, the State of California, the Federal Government, rookery visitors and 700 enthusiastic members that make annual donations.

Current annual attendance records are "officially" listed as 750,000. Many of us with frequent observation experience believe the actual number is much higher. We strongly believe the numbers will increase in the future.

The elephant seal rookery is family friendly with friendly docents and no fees. It is ADA accessible and is open to the public 365 days each year. It is a tremendous resource for all and speaks silently, especially to the foreign visitors, to the character of Americans with regard to environmental issues.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

David Bauer, President

Cc: Senator Cantwell